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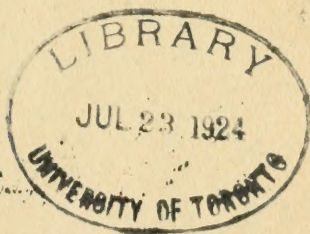
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The Hungarians of Moldavia

By

JOHN TATROSI



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The Hungarians of Moldavia.

By JOHN TATROSI.

In the neighbourhood of Hungary, on the eastern slopes of the Carpathians — a part of the Roumanian Moldavia — there are about 100,000 Hungarians living all abandoned, in a cohesive territory. These so-called Csángó-Hungarians are inhabiting more than 300 villages and parishes in the fertile valleys of the river Seret and its tributaries, and have to a large extent retained their ancient language and customs in spite of difficult political and ethnographical conditions. This industrious, straightforward people who, as to race, creed and tongue, constitutes a *considerable minority* among the predominant Roumanian nation, professes the Roman-Catholic creed and maintains but a single Protestant parish at Szászkut, while there are to be found some Saxon followers of the Greek-Catholic belief in the upper valley of the Tatros (near to Csügés), and some orthodox Catholics who have abandoned the faith of their ancestors and owing to the influence of Roumanian environment have exchanged it for that of the prevalent race.

Since this people pronounce some of the consonants of the Hungarian tongue — particularly the compound *cs* and the letter *s* — in a certain sibilating manner, linguists have drawn the conclusion that the Csángó-Hungarians are the remainders of the ancient Cumanians who had inhabited Moldavia, then called Cumania, and in the XIII. century had become Magyarised and turned Christians in consequence of the influence exercised by the Hungarian missionaries among them. This process of

Magyarisation was intensified and completed by the continuous influx of Székely* settlers from Transylvania, whose language seems to have left the greatest impression upon their tongue and closely resembles it to this day, though the Csángó declension and conjugation is a quite different one and they use some words obsolete among other Hungarians. The influence of the Székely immigration is clearly traceable as the language spoken in the villages next to the Carpathians is quite like that of the Székelys, while that of the northern Csángós is like old Hungarian to such a degree that we seem to read a document of the XV. century when looking at their present writing!

Based on the conclusion to be drawn from these linguistic facts, some earlier authors consider the Csángós as descendants from the Hungarians left behind in Etelköz (the present Bessarabia) who later on joined the Bessenyös or Petchenegs. According to this assumption the Csángós have uninterruptedly inhabited Moldavia since the IX. century. This cannot yet be proved by documents but the fact that the topographical denomination of the parts of Moldavia peopled by Csángós, the names of the mountains, valleys, rivers and villages are Hungarian, even in such places where the Hungarians have been Roumanised owing to their isolated situation and the Hungarian character is preserved but in the strongly Roumanised type, seems ample proof. The first settlers in Moldavia were Hungarians who have extended their ancient settlement along the basin of the Seret, otherwise they would have adopted the names they found in use, would have accepted the topographical denomination already existing. Also a Roumanian historian — RADU ROSSETTI — admits that *the Hungarians are the fellow inhabitants of the Roumanians in the Moldavia of old*, and believes that the Hungarian names there derive from the Székelys who had been induced to emigrate to Moldavia by the Hungarian kings of

* Seculian.

the XIII. century in fear of an invasion on the part of the Cumanians or the Tartars. The medieval history of Hungary does not know about such settlements, and, in my opinion, the Székelys have never left Transylvania in such numbers as to constitute an independent settlement in Moldavia, for in that case we should find the same place names, including the word *Szent* (Saint) so characteristic to Székelyland, also among the Csángó-Hungarians. The lack of such denomination seems to strengthen the assumption that *the Csángós are autochthones of Moldavia*, who had founded their communities in pagan times and were thus found by the Christian late-comers. Their topographical denomination is quite peculiar and unusual, archaic so to say, and of Christian sounding names we find none but the medieval "Egyed-halma" that is Mound of Aegidius, corresponding to to day's "Adjud" which derives from the Latin Aegidius and occurs in some diploma of 1433. But the names of Csángó communities resemble Cumanian and Jassian denomination in many instances and it is evident that these two now disappeared peoples were blended with the Hungarian Csángós akin to them, whose name, according to P. Alexis Gegő, is of Cumanian origin. Another fact of significance is that the Csángós were freeholders, so called *részesek* — *răzeși* — in Moldavia, and not serfs, which likewise seems to point at their having been *the natives* of the country or, at least, its *ancient occupants*, and that the liberation from serfdom realised in 1864 did not find any application regarding their status, with the exception of a small part forcibly enthralled by some Boyar squires.

The Csángó-Hungarians of Moldavia who had turned Christians belonged to the Transylvanian diocese. Later on Rome established a separate Bishop's See for them at Milkó, but this met with destruction during the 1241 invasion of the Tartars. Yet Christianity in Moldavia was reinforced by the Hungarian orders of the Dominican and Franciscan friars, who with missionary

zeal erected churches in the abandoned villages and furnished them with everything necessary for divine service. Although the Bishop's See at Seret was but of short duration yet there always were missionary monks or priests desiring a change, who made up their minds to look up the Catholic settlements in the East. Towards the beginning of the XIV. century the priests banished for Hussite teachings came hither in great numbers and roused to new life the dormant religious zeal of the deserted followers. Strange to say the oldest Hungarian translation of the Bible originates from Moldavia, for the Old Testament (Vienna Code) was translated and written by the Franciscan friars Thomas and Valentine, who between 1436—39, being accused of heresy, fled to that country, while the books of the four Evangelists were translated and written by Gregory Némethi within the walls of the now non-existent cloister of Tatros. (Munich Code.) This is a remarkable cultural phenomenon which could not be quite overshadowed by severe circumstances but, on the contrary, took deep root in the dry soil of Catholic Moldavia. That is why it became necessary to establish anew the old Bishopric of Bacău (episcopatus Bacoviensis) at the end of the XVI. century, which continued to exist for some length of time though incessantly struggling against difficulties and poverty. With the Franciscan friars also Jesuits reached Moldavia during the XVII. century. The operation of these two orders was the more desirable since the Hussites driven from Hungary and later on the numerous Protestant clergymen had alienated a great many Catholics from their ancient creed. These were to be met even at the courts of the Greek Catholic voivodes (princes) of Moldavia, even the wife of one of them — the legendary princess Margaret — was Hungarian and, according to the tradition still alive, had several Catholic churches built in Moldavia, in the middle of the XVII. century. Apart from a few of the voivodes the rulers of Moldavia were by no means

hostile to the Csángó-Hungarians peacefully employed in tilling their soil or culturing their vine; some of them even aided them in the maintenance of their churches. Beginning from the XVII. century however they were left to themselves, most neglectfully treated owing to the fact that Rome had appointed some Polish Bishops to stay with them, who did not like their modest residence at Bákó (Bacău) and thus did not live among their congregations or visit their parishes for decades, neglecting their duty of the needful ecclesiastic control. For that reason the faithful Christians of Moldavia frequently complained, and the few priests who, very rarely alas, paid them ecclesiastic visits and performed their rites, were regarded and treated like apostles. They were considered as God's messengers — as alleged in their books — though they did not always preach in their language. Under such conditions reiterated applications were filed and forwarded to Rome, containing a close description of their sad fate and imploring the Holy See's gracious support in sending them a Hungarian preacher. Rome did not fail to bestow on them the support they had prayed for, which, according to their conception and regardless of the national sentiments in the Csángó-Hungarians' request, devoid of the necessary conscientiousness, consisted in sending them other strangers, Italian and Bulgarian missionaries who did not speak the language of their Hungarian parishioners and would not promote the culture of this people entirely left to themselves. From this time dates the even to-day practised abuse of delegating to Moldavia *only Italian ecclesiastics* — with the difference that at present these priests are Roumanians, which naturally led to the denationalisation of the Moldavian Hungarians, their rapid extinction or rather amalgamation with the Roumanians of their environs. The blending of these two races was still promoted by the liability to serve in the army, by the fairs and daily intercourse, but foremost of all by the Roumanian

Government's establishing some sort of public nurseries (or kindergartens) in the Csángó-Hungarian communities, where the little ones were taught the Roumanian language; an institution to be met with solely in the Csángó-Hungarian villages of Moldavia and in the Bulgarian ones of the Dobrudsha!

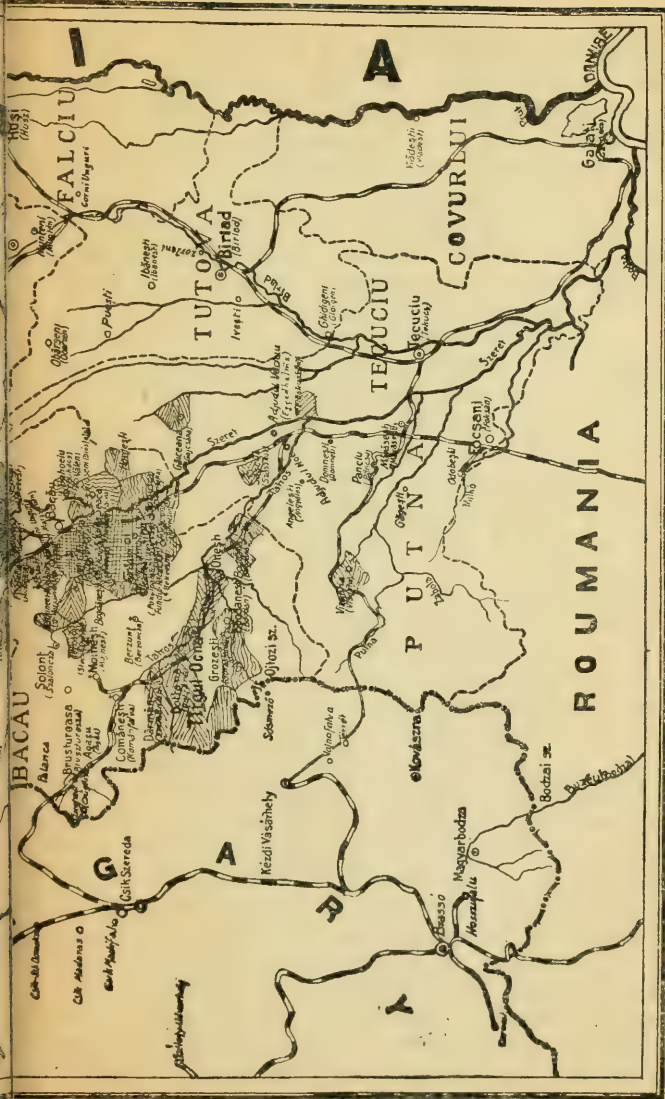
There are sufficient numerical data existing to prove the constant denationalisation of the Csángós. Thus we know from the official reports of Archbishop Mark BANDINI that in 1646 still the parish-councils alternated annually as to the language spoken in many villages of Moldavia; but when gradually the Csángós decreased and there was no more Hungarian clergyman or schoolmaster, this custom vanished. This was the inevitable consequence of the Hungarians' abandoned condition and their destitution of ecclesiastical support. It is the more deplorable since the number of the Hungarians amounting to 15,000 in 1588 was reduced to such a degree owing to years full of strife and warfare that Bishop *B. Quirini*, when travelling through the Moldavian dioceses in the last years of the XVI. century, found but 11,000 inhabitants in the 15 towns and 16 villages constituting the Csángó-Hungarian parishes. Half a century later the afore mentioned Bandini visited village after village of the Moldavian Catholic Hungarians which he describes as dwellers in 1122 houses, stating the name of all heads of family whose numbers had been reduced to the half owing to the Tartars' raids. They only increased again at the end of the XVII. century when the Székely immigration commenced, and attained the figure 9,000 in 1764 when the Székelys crossed the frontier in greater numbers, escaping the ruthless treatment they had to suffer on the part of the Austrian military commander Bukow. The Székelys had for long already regarded Moldavia with a longing eye on account of the more favourable conditions affording an easier livelihood there, the exemption from paying taxes granted the new sett-

lers by the Boyars, and the fertile soil much better suited for the cultivation of corn; all this was a temptation they could no longer resist. Thus their numbers were rapidly increasing, in the first years of the XV. century they account for 15,000, and in 1807 already we find them numbered with 22,000 in official records. The immigration from Transylvania was a continuous one; in 1830 the Austrian consul at Jassy stated the number of Moldavian Hungarians to be 50,000, which estimate is authenticated by the contemporary ecclesiastical registers. A French traveller — *G. Lejean* — estimated their numbers at 44,000 in 1860 while the official Roumanian census of 1859 records 47,680 heads of Moldavian Roman Catholics.

We cannot dwell on fluctuations of the Hungarian population in Moldavia in this brief survey and will but state that, according to the census taken in 1902, the four ecclesiastical districts under the supremacy of the Jassy Roman Catholic diocese comprise 64,501 souls living in 296 parishes, and among the latter some are reported to have more than 3,500 inhabitants, like Szabófalva for instance, while the records show 4 villages with 2,000 and 16 with more than thousand souls, a. s. o.

The denomination of communities inhabited by an originally Hungarian population is Roumanian in administration; but among themselves the Csángós alway use the ancient Hungarian names, as in the case of Jassy, the capital of Moldavia, which is to this day called Jászvásár = the market of the Jassians.

The ecclesiastic statistics are authenticated also by Roumanian official data. According to the census compiled at the end of December 1889, 83,888 Roman Catholics were living in those parts of Moldavia which had been the old settlement of the Csángó-Hungarians. Since there are some non-Magyar Catholics in the towns, we shall take into account but the villagers whose numbers, after deduction of the Roumanian



Catholics living in these villages, prove that 71,764 Catholic Hungarians were living in the Moldavian villages, to which number must still be added the several thousands of Csángó-Hungarians living in towns. Yet the figures of the Jassy Catholic diocese records compiled in 1902 are by about 10,000 lower than that number. There are two obvious reasons offered for explanation. The first is that these records have taken into account but the population of the parishes and not considered the Csángós living dispersed in some far off Moldavian villages. The second of these causes is the fact that many Csángó-Hungarians had been Roumanised in the course of time and were thus classified as Greek-Orthodox which creed they had accepted, diminishing the Roman Catholic columns of the compilation by their numbers. If we still consider the increase of natural growth during the last two decades, we may state the numbers of the Csángó-Hungarians with 100,000, though this figure is daily decreasing owing to ethnographical and political conditions most detrimental to their racial interest.

To illustrate the process of amalgamation, viz. the territorial distribution of the Csángó-Hungarians, we annex the following map, which shows only the more important Csángó villages. Those having a Catholic church are marked with a cross. The Hungarians are the most numerous on the right bank of the river Seret, in the counties of *Roman* and *Bacou*, where in conformity with the Roumanian census of 1899 they account for 23.5% in the first mentioned, and 19.5% of the total population in the second county. In the other ten counties of Moldavia the proportionate figure is nowhere larger than 3%, in the counties of *Tulova* and *Vaslui* it amounts to but 0.3%. The Hungarian population of Moldavia has gradually decreased to this point for — as proved by numerous statements — in older times they were living in the same manner owing to equal conditions of livelihood, in racially nearly pure communities and closely

connected villages. The population of larger villages to this day consists of 80—100⁰/₀ Csángós, as for instance in the communities of *Klészse*, *Forrófalva*, *Kalugyerpataka* or *Szabófalva*, *Tamásfalva* and *Dsidafalva*. The nearly purely Hungarian districts beyond the Seret were slowly Roumanised and the farther eastward we advance the more frequently we find the numbers of the Hungarians decreasing from 20—10⁰/₀. It is surprising that the Hungarian population on the frontier slopes of Transylvania is no denser, which seems to indicate that there was no communication between the Csángós and the neighbouring Transylvanians. Even those who had come from the Székely districts had forgotten their ancestors after a generation or two, and nothing but the family name retained till the present reminds us of their origin.

The most authentic data about the growth of Hungarian Roman Catholic natives of Moldavia, the fluctuations of the members of the Roman Catholic parishes, we find in the schematisms (registers) of the Roman Catholic Mission or diocese of Jassy. From these official compilations those of 1842, 1845, 1857 and 1902 were open to our inspection, thus offering clear insight into the ethnological evolution of this people extending over a period of 80 seasons — three generations — strengthened by the statement of the Austrian agent and others staying at Jassy.

As to the total of the ecclesiastic registers, the number of the Roman Catholic inhabitants in Moldavia was 46,914 for 1842; 52,778 for 1845; 48,032 for 1857 and 64,601 for 1902. This growth, amounting to hardly 38⁰/₀ during 60 years, cannot be called a considerable or natural one since it bears the marks of the process of Roumanisation permanently proceeding and the abandonment of the Roman Catholic faith in conjunction with it. For this reason the increase is a larger one in the villages than in the towns. If we examine the figures for the increase of parishioners, we find that

their growth is of natural proportion in all those communities adjacent to purely Hungarian villages, and, on the other hand, decreasing on the fringes of the Hungarian districts, where the contact with the Roumanian environment is a closer one.

The largest Hungarian village of Moldavia is still to-day *Szabófalva* (Sabacani), whose population accounted for 3448 heads in 1807 but declined to 1601 during 50 years and even at present does not exceed 3491. An equally slow growth is evident also in the communities of the Roumanian deanery. *Halas* (Halaucesti) for instance had 1499 inhabitants in 1800 which augmented to 3440 in 1814, but since then, continually Roumanised, decreased to 1980 in 1807 and show 1585 at present. *Dumafalva* (Rachiteni) shows a population of 1874 souls in 1807, which number declined to 661 in half a century and but slightly increased to 937 to-day. *Tamásfalva* (Tamaşeni) was peopled by 70 Hungarian families in 1646, which number rose to 2370 heads in 1807 and abated to 515 in 1842, and though in 1860 already 1091 souls are recorded there are no more than 1126 at present. *Ardalos* (Oţeleni) had 430 inhabitants in 1842, and to-day there are but 990 although its population was 2007 still in 1860. Renowned for its Hungarian clergymen was *Klészse* (Cleja) which registered 1448 heads in 1800 and 1978 in 1807, and proves the destructive effect of the Roumanian environment by a falling off from the 3624 inhabitants of 1860 to 3315 in 1899 and 1502 to-day. In the same way were the *Förőfalva* (Făraoani) Hungarians diminished, which accounted for 1554 heads in 1800, increased to 1935 in 1807, and, in spite of their numbers amounting to 2790 in 1860, were reduced to 1620 in 1899 and 1489 in 1902. *Kalugyerpatoka* (Calugăra) fared as badly with 2347 inhabitants in 1800, whose numbers rose to 3647 in 1807 owing to Székely immigration, registered 2642 in 1860 still and but 2248 for the present.

There are few places that exhibit permanent growth. *Bogdánfalva* (Valeaseacă) for example was inhabited by 55 families in 1646, but in 1800 recorded a population of 1148 heads already, which continually increases to 1590 in 1857, to 1827 in 1860 and 2170 in 1902. *Prezest* (Prăjăști) shows a population of 1104 heads in 1842; 1217 in 1845, but 1038 in 1857, and though 3620 in 1860 there are no more than 1454 heads to-day. *Gorzafalva* (Grozesti) accounted for 69 heads of family in 1646, whose offsprings numbered 1581 in 1807 but decreased for about half a century to 2801 in 1860, amounting to 2069 merely in 1902.

The villages registering a population below 500 in 1857 have displayed but a very slight growth, and there are *more than* 100 such parishes inhabited by a considerable Hungarian majority 70 or 100 years ago, which *are entirely Roumanised* by this day, where the few eventually still standing churches betray the effect of the slowly advancing alien penetration by their Greek cross and images, of the influence which the orphan Hungarians left to themselves could not resist.

Our map marks communities with entirely extinct Hungarian population and the most interesting among them is the town of Huși, where the Hungarians, increased by the immigrated Hussites, have been completely Roumanised and diminished to 1—2000 heads living in the suburbs, though faithful to their ancient Catholic creed.

It is no small wonder that the Moldavian Hungarians, considering their disadvantageous geographical location and precarious livelihood afforded them, are not yet totally Roumanised. A Roumanian journalist, visiting them in autumn 1903, made the observation that "in many villages no one knows Roumanian except the clergyman and the public notary, and though the Hungarians are on friendly terms with the rest of the population, they are living in separated quarters of the mixed communities and profess

themselves Magyars or Catholics but by no means Roumanians. They very rarely enter mixed marriages and remain faithful Catholics. It is most interesting to notice in what measure the Csángó-Hungarians differ from the population of the neighbouring Roumanian villages: in the manner of building their homes, in cleanliness, order, customs and behaviour. These Hungarian villages constitute real isles in the Roumanian sea which threatens to devour this assiduous people who for centuries have retained their language, who to this day speak exclusively Hungarian at home and in the open square, whose womenfolk does not know Roumanian as a rule. On the other hand, the Roumanian "pope" performs their rites, preaches and wells them and listens to their confessions, even their books of instruction are Roumanian for some time already. The Roumanian government, by the Act of 1893, prohibited the use of the Hungarian language in the churches of the Csángó-Hungarians where no one but the precentors know Hungarian. These men are called *diák* (bedels) by the Hungarians and they insist upon their being fellow-villagers; yet the language used during singing lessons is by no means Hungarian, nor is it the text of the songs. The Hungarian children are never taught the Hungarian language or songs, neither in the village schools where the hitherto used religious textbooks in Roumanian-Hungarian languages were substituted by purely Roumanian ones edited by the Jassy diocese established in 1894 in conformity with the Roumanian Government's decision. This act is the more offensive since Article XXI of the Roumanian Constitution unconditionally *ensures the free exercise of all religious rites* provided it does not interfere with public morals or public order.

These illegal proceedings on the part of the Roumanian Government soon resulted in the deplorable fact of the Csángó-Hungarians rapid Roumanisation also in such places which twenty years ago were the centres of flourishing Hungarian life, and of the Hungarian language

being applied by word of mouth merely since nowhere the art of reading or writing it was taught.

If to these 100,000 Hungarians partaking of Moldavian public life and considered as Roumanian citizens we add the Hungarian subjects who are living a Bucharest or scattered all over the country as tradesmen, coachmen and domestic servants, and whose number exceeds 40,000, the total of Hungarians in Roumania amounts to 140,000. The Hungarian State has intervened on behalf of this considerable minority at the Paris Conference, to ensure the Roumanian Hungarians the use of their language and unrestrained exercise of their religious rites, which has been warranted by the already mentioned paragraph of the Roumanian constitution, by a special decree, and is claimed on the basis of international law.

In the Austrian Peace Treaty of Saint Germain some paragraphs are taken down that seem to safeguard the observance of the minorities' rights and their peaceful evolution. The Hungarian Government however as well as public opinion do not forward any other claims on behalf of the 100,000 Moldavian Hungarians living in uniform communities for about thousand years than the rights granted to the Roumanians in Hungary, where several 1000 Roumanian elementary and numerous public schools, training-schools and colleges for professionals, teachers and students of divinity exist. The language of instruction and of examinations at the end of the school-year is Roumanian in these schools and in compliance with Art. XLIV of 1868, the Roumanian believers were granted not only the right of freely exercising the rites of their religious creed, but also that of establishing an unlimited number of churches and schools and the equal rights of other citizens and the liberty of press. This fundamental law provides for subsidies to be granted to the Roumanian Church and schools in Hungary, and for the Roumanian clergymen and teachers participating of the same financial aid and support as bestowed on

purely Hungarian ones, in such liberal manner as unequalled by any other nation of the world!

However the Memorandum of the Hungarian Peace Delegation was not considered by the Paris Conference and thus the poor Csángó-Hungarians — as considerable minority, — did not succeed on this occasion in obtaining the right of developing their national culture.

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